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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VERSHBOW DISCUSSES OPCON WITH GNP  
PARLIAMENTARY VICE SPEAKER LEE SANG-DEUK

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: GNP National Assembly Vice Speaker Lee Sang-deuk told the Ambassador on September 19 that the Grand National Party (GNP) was opposed to OPCON transfer. Lee emphasized that the purpose of his planned September 20-23 visit to the United States was to ask that OPCON talks be suspended and to tell members of the U.S. Congress and representatives from the State Department and the Pentagon that most Korean people were against the discussion of wartime operational control (OPCON) transfer while President Roh was in office. Lee also asked for help arranging appropriate meetings in Washington. We recommend that appropriate State and DoD officials meet with the Vice Speaker and his delegation, so that opponents of OPCON transfer are assured we have taken their concerns seriously. END SUMMARY.

GNP'S VIEW ON OPCON

12. (C) In the September 19 meeting with the Vice Speaker and five GNP leaders, Vice Speaker Lee Sang-deuk outlined the GNP's official position on OPCON transfer. Lee said the four points he made to the press earlier on September 19 were: (1) Talks on OPCON transfer should be suspended; (2) current alliance structure and the CFC command should be maintained; (3) OPCON transfer at this time would not be in the U.S. interest; and (4) there was a need to strengthen overall U.S.-ROK cooperation.

13. (C) Lee emphasized that the Korean people were against the transfer of wartime OPCON and that those against the transfer outnumber those for the transfer by a 2 to 1 margin. In addition, Roh's term was almost over, therefore, Roh does not have the right to carry out talks on OPCON transfer, Lee noted. If the transfer happened during Roh's tenure, it could cause problems in the U.S.-ROK relationship because so many Koreans were against the transfer. He added that the opposition to the transfer extended far beyond the GNP and included 20 members of the ruling Uri Party and even former members of the Roh administration.

AMBASSADOR EXPLAINS U.S. POSITION

14. (C) The Ambassador said he appreciated the many concerns

regarding OPCON transfer among Koreans and added he would prefer there was more consensus on OPCON in Korea so that after the transfer, Koreans would feel safer and better about their security and their security relationship with the United States. When we decide on the timing of transfer of wartime OPCON transfer, we would like as much common understanding as possible and widespread agreement, the Ambassador said.

15. (C) The Ambassador emphasized that the U.S. believed that Korea was militarily capable and ready to take full control of wartime OPCON. The transfer of wartime OPCON was part of a natural evolution and, in the long term, will make the relationship more balanced and make Koreans feel better about the relationship with the United States. The most important issue was that deterrence of North Korea and our collective military capability to defend the Peninsula were not diminished through the transfer process. The U.S. wanted the DPRK to be "just as deterred" at the end of the transfer process. The U.S. goal was that the U.S.-ROK alliance and combined military capability stay as strong after the transfer as they are now, the Ambassador said.

#### SEPTEMBER 14 SUMMIT - DISCUSSION OF OPCON

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16. (C) The Ambassador said the September 14 summit proceeded from the assumption that the transfer of OPCON was a common goal. He said President Roh acknowledged the controversy regarding transfer of wartime OPCON in Korea. The conclusion at the September 14 summit was that the issue not be politicized, and that military experts should be responsible for consultations to determine the most suitable timing of the transfer. The final decision could be made by Defense Ministers after military experts agreed on a roadmap

outlining steps to transfer wartime OPCON and the timing. One of President Bush's goals at the September 14 U.S.-ROK summit was to reassure the Korean people that despite changes in the structure of the alliance, the U.S. maintained its strong commitment to Korea. In addition, despite the reduction in U.S. troops stationed in Korea from 37,000 to 25,000, the U.S. capability was just as strong and just as lethal today as it was when there were more troops stationed here.

17. (C) On the issue of timing, the Ambassador assured Lee that at each stage of implementation of the roadmap, there would be evaluations of progress and adjustments, if necessary. This process should reassure those who have doubts about the transfer, the Ambassador said.

#### QUESTIONS ON SUMMIT

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18. (C) Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee member Park Jin asked the Ambassador about the statement Presidents Bush and Roh made pledging OPCON would not be politicized, noting President Roh's frequent description of the issue as a recovery of Korean sovereignty. The Ambassador said it was not appropriate to define OPCON as an issue of sovereignty since Korea already shared sovereignty. The U.S. position was that the goal of OPCON transfer had been agreed upon, and now military experts should handle the consultations regarding the roadmap and timing of the transfer. The discussion should focus on what measures and processes ensured effective deterrence rather than political issues.

19. (C) Park also asked about the "common and broad" approach to North Korea and its nuclear program. The Ambassador explained that there were wide discussions on this important issue during the meeting between Secretary Rice and NSA Hadley and their Korean counterparts FM Ban and NSA Song. He said during the summit meeting the two leaders did not discuss specifics of the "common and broad" approach but that VFM Chun Young-woo would discuss ways to bring North Korea back to the Six Party Talks when he meets EAP A/S Hill on September 20. The comprehensive approach referred to the

September 19 Beijing declaration - the challenge now was to formulate an implementation strategy.

¶10. (C) GNP Supreme Council member Chun Yu-ok said she believed the process leading to OPCON transfer should be reversed - instead of a summit and then military experts working out the details, experts should consult, public support should be obtained, and only then the leaders should decide on OPCON transfer. Deciding now, when the North Koreans were threatening to conduct a nuclear test, was inappropriate. The Ambassador said again that the roadmap would ensure that the alliance would remain strong after the transfer, and that experts would address the issue of timing. He said Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld had a very high estimation of the ROK military and that was why he supported the transfer of OPCON.

#### OPCON TRANSFER - TIMING, TIMING, TIMING

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¶11. (C) Vice Speaker Lee said he agreed the U.S. and ROK should plan the transfer of OPCON, but he remained concerned about the timing of the actual transfer. Defense officials should decide on the right time for the transfer and not politicians like President Roh. Roh was pushing the transfer, and many people in the ROK were worried about the future of the security situation in Korea. Lee said 2009 and 2012 were both dates produced for political reasons in the U.S. and the ROK; a new date should be decided upon based on defense and security concerns, including the continued North Korean threat. The Ambassador said the most desirable outcome was one that the majority of Korean people could understand and support.

¶12. (C) There was one month left before the Defense Ministers' meeting, the Ambassador said, so Lee's visit to Washington was a timely opportunity to contribute to the discussion of OPCON transfer. He added there was value in people in Washington hearing the GNP's concerns directly. Lee asked again for support in arranging appropriate meetings

with counterparts in the State and Defense Departments.  
VERSHBOW